

Good News Daily

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Sunday, May 9

Matthew 13:24-34a *He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."* (v.33 RSV)

Mystery abounds in life and in fiction. Jesus tells parables, puzzlements themselves, to explain mysteries of the kingdom of God. Does Jesus intend these tales to clarify or to provoke?

How does a small mustard seed, for example, grow into a plant much larger than one would expect? Why does a weed, evil, strongly resemble wheat, good? Why warn of and promise a judgment day? Apparently, time remains for us to grow in goodness before that day, yet we certainly need to keep that day in mind.

Yeast or leaven has, from ancient times, provided further mystery. I, for one, do not understand the bacterial fermentation processes within dough. *Joy of Cooking* informs readers that Mexicans think of these "risers" as souls or spirits. How does leavening hidden within about fifty pounds of flour expand enough to make the whole dough rise?

In three short parables some item is hidden: tares among wheat, seed in soil, leaven in flour. In each case, the hidden item mysteriously grows. Does each act of goodness, yours and mine, somehow result in an expanding kingdom of God?

Joshua 24:1-28; Psalms 93, 96; 1 Timothy 3:14—4:5

Monday, May 10

Luke 9:18-27 *And he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."* (v.20)

Today's readings relate to trials—coming trials of Jesus and continuing trials of his followers. The psalm reminds us that often we beg in our relationship with God. Deuteronomy recalls our needs to keep the commandments and to live for other than bread. James points out that our own desires tempt us. Implied throughout is that trial and testing produce firmer faith.

In the reading from Luke, Jesus asks two questions. He wonders how crowds perceive him, and he receives a variety of responses. His direct and personal question, though, elicits acknowledgment from Peter. In fact, Peter alone confesses here Jesus as the long-awaited Savior—God's anointed ruler, the Messiah, the Christ of God.

Earlier Jesus was reading in the synagogue in Nazareth of the expected prophet who will relieve the oppressed. Jesus then says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

In infant Baptism, sponsors confess Christ for us. In creeds we speak for ourselves. We can consider others' reactions to Jesus Christ, yet his pointed question still confronts us: "But who do you say that I am?"

Deuteronomy 8:1-10; Psalm 80; James 1:1-15

Tuesday, May 11

Luke 11:1-13 *He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." And he said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be thy name.'"* (vv.1-2)

Jesus reveals how we can pray. I firmly believe his first word charts our course in praying. In responding to his disciple's request, "Lord, teach us to pray," without any hesitation Jesus begins: "Father."

Saying "Father" allows us to acknowledge our relationship with God. The Aramaic "Abba, Father" conveys intimacy and endearment. Whether we say, "Dearest Dad," "Daddy," "Papa," the familiarity of address lets us share with Jesus in his communion with God. Confessing "Father" serves as an individual act as well as a corporate act.

“Father” characterizes the entire Lord’s Prayer, and the Latin *Pater Noster* serves as its title. That utterance admits that God has charge of our lives. It sets priorities. In recognizing our one Father in God, we admit that His kingdom and His will come before ours.

Better than a father and mother head an earthly family, God provides more care, love, discipline, unity, and example. Donald Coggan in the *Oxford Companion to the Bible* says that we seek His “provision, pardon, and protection.” This single word “Father” holds us in relationship for life.

Deuteronomy 8:11-20; Psalm 78:1-39; James 1:16-27

Wednesday, May 12

James 5:13-18 *Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.* (v.16)

Prayer recurs in this week’s readings, and this advice adds an unexpected twist to our prayer life. We pray for any number of reasons—petitioning, interceding, offering, thanking, confessing, praising, adoring. In this passage, however, the result of praying becomes our own spiritual health.

Are you and I without ease or diseased unless and until we pray? In one outstanding incident, only prayer works to heal one who has an unclean spirit (Mark 9:29).

The writer of the Letter of James has foreseen the usefulness of treating the whole person in healing. Medical practitioners today do encourage the use of a variety of people who can help in that treatment. Mere removal of physical illness may be inadequate. Forgiveness and prayer also prove effective in holistic treatment.

We know we ought to “pray constantly” as Paul directs us to do (1 Thessalonians 5:17). In fact, Paul repeats that counsel (Romans 12:12, Ephesians 6:18, and Colossians 4:2). Paul also offers this help: “We do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26).

Leviticus 26:27-42; Psalm 119:97-120; Luke 12:22-31

Thursday, May 13

Psalm 8 *What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou care for him?* (v.3)

We can imagine the psalmist singing this question on a clear starry night. Considering his asking today, some 2,000 years after the birth of Christ, gives the query new meaning.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews sees Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the psalmist’s prophetic probe. We can still ask with humility, “What worth can humankind possibly have in this grand cosmos in the sight of God?” The answer resides in Jesus who lived, suffered, died, and ascended. It is he who is the central meaning for our lives.

Because Jesus was tempted as we, he understands our temptations. He serves as “pioneer and perfecter” of our salvation through his suffering (Hebrews 12:2). We see Jesus in glory because he tasted “death for every one” (Hebrews 2:9).

The question of Psalm 8, then, has its abundant response in the New Covenant. With God’s gift of His Son to us, especially on Ascension Day when our Lord was lifted up, we can readily say, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!”

Ezekiel 1:1-14, 24-28b; Psalm 47; Hebrews 2:5-18; Matthew 28:16-20

Friday, May 14

Luke 9:28-36 *And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”* (v.35)

Prayer surprises us with revelations. With Jesus himself at prayer, Peter, John, and James see his glory. Then these disciples see, hear, and feel God’s presence. The overshadowing cloud and the voice of God startle the three. What does it take to get our attention and theirs?

As we pray, we, too, feel God’s presence. With grace we see Jesus. Since God already knows our needs before we ask, we are aligning our wills with his (Matthew 6:8). That alignment furthers the kingdom of God.

That aligning of wills does more; it reveals us to ourselves. God's presence allows us to uncover our own shortcomings. Prayer shows us paths and supplies us strengths. Praying results in answers, too. We leave prayer as persons different from those who entered it.

Although perhaps with less drama than for Peter and his companions, prayer reveals. In praying, then, we discover at least self, Jesus, and God.

Ezekiel 1:28—3:3; Psalms 85, 86; Hebrews 4:14—5:6

Saturday, May 15

Hebrews 5:7-14 *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you again the first principles of God's word.* (v.12a)

This scolding reminder tells us, as if we did not know, that we often lack Christian maturity. In matters of morality we can sometimes be found acting as small children.

The Letter to the Hebrews stresses Jesus' supremacy and his full humanity in his temptation and suffering. While priests of old had tried to offer ritual sacrifices, Jesus perfected the process in obediently offering himself for us.

The Hebrews author says, in effect, we are tuning out lessons we ought to hear. The difficult "first principles" message is this: We do not know good from evil. The essential teaching to develop that capability comes as we encounter Jesus as the perfect example of obedience. Said another way, Christian maturity demands of us discipline and practice in recognizing good.

Ezekiel 3:4-17; Psalms 87, 90; Luke 9:37-50

by Patricia Swift

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